

Representation, (Re)Mediation, and Curricular Forms: Multimodal Possibilities and Challenges for Curriculum Studies

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The two editorial essays and two articles featured in this issue of the journal are based on a series of talks commissioned for the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies (CACS) Presidential Session held during the 2010 Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) at Concordia University last spring. In keeping with the theme for the 2010 Congress, “Connected Understanding,” Karen A. Krasny, President of CACS, invited three curriculum scholars – Suzanne de Castell (Simon Fraser University), Jennifer Jenson (York University), and Bronwen Low (McGill University) – to join her in responding to the question: *How do multiple modes of representation engender new possibilities and challenges for curriculum studies?*

In this way, the papers presented in this issue of the journal reflect on the theme of ‘connected understanding’ conceived in relation to the complexities of communication and meaning-making in our multi-mediated time. If curriculum can be thought of as the ‘course’ or object

through which we develop understandings of the world, how are we to think about curriculum in relation to the media through which those understandings and those who understand are connected to one another? How should we think about the multimodality of curriculum and our place in histories of representation? In exploring these questions, the papers in this issue address practices and theories of curriculum, and, more broadly, aspects of educational theory and research, to provide insight into how representational technologies, both 'new' and old, are (re)shaping epistemological and ontological landscapes in education.

In their two very different but complimentary and compelling editorial essays, Krasny and de Castell both argue for an attention to spaces of mediation as offering us the 'right to play' with our curriculum. In contrast to practices of benchmarking, standardization, and mandated outcomes, which she provocatively suggests engender a kind of "libracide," Krasny wonders about the possibilities inherent in representational practices to develop "aesthetic capacity" through, for example, "the experiential stuff used to imaginatively respond to and make meaning from literary texts." Following Dewey, and others, Krasny draws our attention to the "the gradual erosion of aesthetic capacity in curriculum" and "the disregard for aesthetic and affective factors" in schools, and argues instead for "the ruminating reading that would allow for psychic fulfillment, psychological affirmation, moral deliberation, empathetic projection, and the chance to embody the text and mull over our own intentions, assumptions and positions."

de Castell's essay articulates a similar set of concerns through her consideration of "ludic epistemology" and its calls to "reform and re-forge relations between learning and play" and to educate "not through commanding and enforcing learner attention, but by attracting and engaging it." Like Krasny, de Castell argues for the importance of pleasure for "deep engagement" and the importance of play for the risk-

taking that real learning requires. Grounding her exploration of “ludic epistemology” in the conditions of environmental and social emergency that characterizes our contemporary landscapes, de Castell argues for “the resuscitation of ‘play’ as inseparable from and indispensable for teaching, learning and the advancement of knowledge under unprecedented conditions of uncertainty.” In “playing around with curriculum,” she argues, we might return our learning to “the material conditions of lived actuality” and resist a model of curriculum as a “containment field” that circumvents our attempts “to inhabit, to salvage and even, perhaps, renew” our imperilled global environment.

Following directly on de Castell’s call for a “ludic epistemology” in curriculum studies, and in an elaboration of Jenson’s address at the CACS Presidential Symposium, Jenson, Taylor, and de Castell offer a provocative case study that illustrates the rewards of a curriculum that privileges play. Reporting on “the design, development and initial implementation of an online educational resource entitled *Epidemic: Self-Care for Crisis*,” Jenson et al consider “what it means to encode knowledge in the form of a game, and to come to know as a process of playing that game.” Rather than asking what players of *Epidemic* learned from the game, Jenson et al refigure curriculum studies itself by wondering instead about the significance of players’ affect and attention in relation to the game: “when and how laughter, engagement and attention are most at work.” In this way, their study issues a challenge to educators and educational theorists to “not simply demand differently-mediated... forms of production-based assessment... but to return to a notion of education as the cultivation of dispositions and abilities for living meaningful... lives.”

Low shares a similar curiosity about how and why subjects use various media for their own ends, engaging in experiences of pleasure and resistance, and in the process reinventing the very structures of curriculum, such as language, that we tend to take for granted. In her

study, Low considers “the complex and evolving dynamic between orality and writing” and “how they matter and what they mean for literacy education.” In addition to offering a brief history of debates on the differences and relationships between orality and literacy, Low examines several ‘scenes’ or instances of what she calls the oral/written matrix, located in the diverse spaces of “a Jamaican school talent show, an online website, and multilingual Montreal classrooms.” Following Edouard Glissant’s thinking on “creolization,” Low explores what these scenes might tell us about “the ‘creolizations’ of language, identity, and culture under conditions of contemporary globalization as well as the persistence and evolution of forms of secondary orality.” Like Krasny, de Castell, and Jenson et al, Low’s study offers an inherent critique of curriculum conceptualized as a fixed set of objects, knowledges, or experiences that can be standardized. Instead, she calls on curriculum theorists and educators “to retain a sense of humility, curiosity, and even wonder about how, where, and why people continue to use language for their own purposes, bending and remaking the rules as they go.”

Finally, this issue concludes with a feature article published under the section “Curriculum Lives,” a section originally conceived by the founding editors of JCACS, Dennis Sumara and Rebecca Luce-Kapler, as a space in which to publish “biographical and autobiographical pieces that feature the work of Canadian curriculum scholars” and “offer insights into the working practices of those individuals” through histories of their work in the field (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2003, p. 2). In this issue’s featured “curriculum life,” David Lewkowich offers a lyrical and complex portrait of the work of Judith Robertson and her significant contributions to the field of curriculum studies. Not unlike the other essays in this issue, this study of Robertson’s work reminds us how central curriculum theorists, like Robertson, have been to thinking about the limits and excesses of language, and, more generally, of representation. Lewkowich offers a thoughtful and moving survey of

Robertson's work and influence, particularly drawing attention to her insistence that in our encounters with textual objects there is always something "burning at the edges" – "a desire that the encounter of reading awakes, provokes, and inspires." Lewkowich casts his own engagement with Robertson's work in the same light as Robertson's thinking about the reader's engagement with the text, mobilizing the notion of "latching" to describe the ways in which we attach to objects both with great volition and by accident. Following Robertson's thinking, and echoing the other essays published in this issue, Lewkowich eloquently suggests that "in recovering the unpredictable nature of our encounters with the textual world we are also encouraged to recuperate education's (sometimes lost) potential for invention and spontaneity, and to claim the erratic pulsations of curriculum and language as something always lived and embodied."

References

- Sumara, D., & Luce-Kaplar, R. (2003). "Editor's Introduction: Inventing New Vocabularies for Curriculum Studies in Canada." *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, Vol 1 (1), p. 2.